A

LETTER

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

RICHARD Lord Bishop of LANDAFF,

ON THE PROJECTED

REFORMATION

OF THE

CHURCH:

PARTICULARLY RESPECTING

THE INFERIOR CLERGY.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN the following Pages no apology is attempted to the learned Prelate, for preſuming to addreſs him in this form, without his knowledge or permiſſion. The Author muſt ground his excuſe on the nature of the ſubject; his Lordſhip, in appealing to the ſenſe of the Public on his propoſals, has voluntarily ſubjected himſelf to whatever inconveniencies may reſult from conſidering him as a leader in the buſineſs of *Eccleſiaſtical Reformation.*

Though this Tract may appear the child of a particular occaſion, the Author flatters himſelf, that it will be found of general and permanent utility, as exhibiting a *full and fair ſtate of the caſe*, ſo far as reſpects the *inferior Clergy.* It may be proper to mention, that ſome outlines of what is here ſubmitted to the Public, made their appear-

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ance in a periodical work; in a very unfiniſhed dreſs they were fortunate enough to attract the attention of ſome reſpectable literary Characters: this circumſtance, and the probability, that *the ſtate of the Church will ſhortly come under the notice of Parliament*, encouraged the Author to give his ſentiments more at large, and offer them to the public in the preſent form.

APRIL, 1783.

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LETTER, &c.

MY LORD,

I Have peruſed, with ſome attention, your Lordſhip's letter to the late Archbiſhop of Canterbury. The ſubject has frequently occupied my thoughts; and on one part of it, at leaſt, I flatter myſelf I can offer ſome obſervations not foreign to the purpoſe. For many reaſons I ſhall beg leave to decline the diſcuſſion of the firſt object of your propoſals, and confine myſelf to ſpeculations more adapted to my capacity and information: not apprehending a ſcarcity of polemics, where ſo many are, or fancy themſelves, intereſted.

Before we proceed, it will be proper to beſtow a few words upon a queſtion, which it may perhaps be ſuggeſted, your Lordſhip has not treated quite ſo explicitly, as the nature of your ſubject would induce us to expect, I mean, *the neceſſity* and *ſeaſonableneſs* of *a reformation in the Church*; of both theſe ſome will be inclined to doubt, and as far as is conſiſtent with that brevity I am under a neceſſity of preſerving, I would reſpect even the prejudices of my readers.

I know there are ſome, who carry their reverence for antiquity to ſo romantic an extreme, that I wonder every *new* law for the prevention or puniſhment of crimes, is not regarded by them as an innovation. It may be ſatisfactory to ſuch men, to know, that what I have to propoſe is *no novelty*, but the *ancient conſtitution of the Church*; it is the letter as well as the ſpirit of the *Canons* *; has been thought worthy the attention of every religious age, and has met the approbation of every enlightened

* See particularly Can. 33, 34. 40. Theſe Canons, which may be almoſt looked upon as the pillars of the Church of England, are *ſhamefully violated* every day.

Churchman,

Churchman, from Hooker* to the moſt diſtinguiſhed characters of the preſent century. Should I be found to differ from what is now the apparent conſtitution of the Church, the charge of *innovation* muſt revert to ſome other quarter. I am unconſcious of any principle in my heart or mind that ſhould captiouſly diſpoſe me to the love of change. It is with the anxiety of a lover, I lament the diſorders of the Church; it is with the ſincerity of a friend, I plead for their correction.

" But granting the Church to have deviated from the purity and wiſdom of its original conſtitution, is it *a time* for reformation?" There is no temper more dangerous than that procraſtinating diſpoſition, which permits evil to grow to ſeed, and ſpread itſelf, till it baffle every attempt to eradicate it. Time renders vice familiar, and the period of reformation is while men have yet ſome

* See the latter part of the 5th book of *Eccleſiaſtical Polity*. Hooker wrote his book profeſſedly in oppoſition to thoſe fantaſtical ſectaries who aimed at levelling all diſtinctions in Church and State; and amongſt whom it was a favourite tenet, that to *ſtarve* the *Clergy* was an apoſtolical injunction, as I believe it continues to be with the remnant of thoſe fanatics at this day. It muſt be confeſſed, he apologizes, in ſome degree, for pluralities and non-reſidence, but he pleads only for a few exceptions to the rigour of the law. On the whole he condems them, and his words can by no means be conſtrued in favour of ſo general an abuſe of the Canon as we now experience.

regard for virtue remaining. Shall we ſay, that the vices of the Church are not yet arrived to that maturity of corruption which demands immediate relief? I ſhall bleſs the evidence that confutes me, if any ſober reaſoner will prove me in the wrong, when I aſſert *they are*, when I aſſert that *the Church of England at this day exhibits the moſt alarming ſymptoms of diſorder and decay* If, my Lord, reformation ever can be ſeaſonable, it muſt be at a time when the unproſperous ſtate of Chriſtianity is the melancholy theme of every Epiſcopal declamation *—When the progreſs of Methodiſm is no leſs to be dreaded than the prevalence of Infidelity—When the adverſaries of Revelation are many and powerful, and its defenders are few—When indifference, if not contempt, for the eſtabliſhed religion pervades all, and eſpecially the ſuperior, ranks of ſociety †—When the Miniſters of religion

* See moſt of the late Faſt Sermons before the Lords.—The cry of *Infidelity* and *Arianiſm* has been re-echoed from every preſs.

† The little religion that is left among us, ſeems to ſhelter itſelf under the enchantments of novelty. A ſpurious Socinianiſm is eagerly embraced by the majority of thoſe, who denominate themſelves rational Chriſtians; while a pernicious enthuſiaſm takes advantage of the impetuous paſſions of the vulgar, to ſeduce them from the temperate and ſalutary ſway of the eſtabliſhed Church.

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religion are no longer venerable in the eyes even of the vulgar, and when they themſelves appear either careleſs, or diſheartened from attempting to retrieve their character—When men do not bluſh *openly* to make a *traffic* of *the word* of *God*—When no encouragement is held forth to virtue or genius, and money is almoſt the only key to advancement and reſpect—When *ſhop-men* and *mechanics* preſs from every quarter into the eſtabliſhed pulpits, and diſgrace them by a jargon, which was formerly confined to the loweſt of the ſectaries *. If ever reformation can be ſeaſonable, it muſt be, when, by the relaxation of diſcipline, all order is ſubverted, and the Clergy are confounded with the Laity in their follies and their vices.—No times, no excuſes can be urged for the

In the mean time the converts from the old ſects are few, and many Miniſters of character and education have deſerted the cauſe, and ſought for refuge in other profeſſions; nay, ſome of them among the direct oppoſers of our eſtabliſhment.

* For a mortifying proof of what I advance, let any man of taſte and erudition look in at moſt of the afternoon lectures throughout the metropolis, or at any of thoſe places where ſome noted *religious face-maker* (as Dr. Eachard calls thoſe Harlequin preachers) is ſtationed to extract charitable contributions from hard-hearted citizens. Would ſuch men have been admitted and encouraged in the days of GIBSON and SHERLOCK?—No, theſe meteors would have glittered in their proper hemiſphere, *Clare-market and a tub.*

continuance of ſuch abuſes as theſe.—By protraction they muſt increaſe, and produce an alteration of themſelves: and ſpontaneous alterations are generally violent. The true conſtruction of this argument is, *it will never be a time for reformation.*—Among thoſe who make uſe of it, many (for reaſons of their own) do not wiſh a reformation; many are too timid or too indolent, were the time ever ſo propitious, to move a finger to effect it.

"But if we commence alterations, there is no ſaying where they may ſtop." I own, my Lord, I do not ſee that the rectifying a few glaring abuſes and abſurdities, muſt of neceſſity bring on anarchy and ruin. That an Act of Parliament for increaſing the ſtipends of Curates, or adding to the income of the poorer benefices, by juſt and reaſonable means, ſhould threaten the overthrow of the conſtitution, is, I own, a conſequence far above my capacity to diſcover; nor do I profeſs to underſtand the logic, by which ſuch a concluſion is demonſtrated. I have, in my plain mode

of reaſoning, been accuſtomed to think, that improvements may be made in every art, ſcience, or inſtitution, without endangering its principles. Had this torpidity, this obſtinate attachment to cuſtom prevailed through former ages, human nature muſt have remained in a ſtate of barbariſm and idolatry, no laws would have been enacted, no arts invented, Chriſtianity and the Proteſtant religion would never have enlightened mankind *.

I cannot, indeed, wonder that the *ſleek* Simoniacal Divine ſhould be tolerably contented with the preſent condition of the Church, or ſhould preach *paſſive obedience* and *non-reſiſtance* to the *Jus Divinum* of *pluralities*. From theſe worthies we may expect many an edifying lecture on the danger of alterations, and many a repetition of

* That the legiſlature has often interfered for the real benefit of the Church, might be proved, by referring to ſeveral Acts of Parliament. See particularly 12 Ann, c. 12. which enacts, that the ſtipends of Curates ſhall bear a proportion to the value of the living, not leſs than 20l. nor more than 50l. per annum. This acts wants to be amended, by taking the invidious taſk from the Biſhops, aſcertaining the proportion that the ſalary ought always to bear, allowing pariſhioners to take up the matter in favour of the Curates, and regulating the ſalary according to the preſent value of money.—See alſo 1 Geo. I. c. 10, &c. &c.

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the brief, ingenious, and concluſive maxim, "This is not the time for reformation;" but I truſt they muſt bring more convincing arguments, before they prove as ſucceſsful in inducing political, as they generally are in promoting natural drowſineſs.

Your Lordſhip very properly remarks, that *the Clergy who are diſperſed through the kingdom, may be conſidered as a little leaven preſerving from corruption the whole maſs.* Viewing them in this light, I cannot help attributing to the following grievances, which ſeem to affect only the Clergy, a conſiderable portion of the irreligion of the preſent times. Firſt, the poverty and wretchedneſs of the inferior Clergy, and the impoſſibility of preferment through merit or virtue. Secondly, the admiſſion of ignorant and mean perſons into the Church. And laſtly, the relaxation of the laws intended for the regulation of the morals of the Clergy.

In an age but too much inclined to whatever countenances vice, and ſerves to remove the ſalu-

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tary terrors of revealed religion, we ought carefully to guard againſt every thing that may draw contempt on an order, with which the credit and dignity of religion is ſo intimately connected. To whatever part of the world we direct our attention, we ſee that appearances ſway the bulk of mankind. It is impoſſible for the human feelings entirely to disjoin the ideas of the profeſſion and the man: amiable or ſtriking qualities in a perſon ſometimes will ſanctify abſurdity; and rags, want, meanneſs, or ill qualities in a character will degrade whatever may unfortunately happen to be united with them. If the profeſſors of religion are in ſuch a ſituation as excites contempt, the multitude, who judge only from their feelings, will hardly retain all proper reſpect for the inſtitution itſelf. If, further, they ſee this profeſſor of religion degrade himſelf by performing baſe and ſervile offices, to which his poverty may reduce him; or, what is worſe, by practices ſcarcely conſiſtent with ſtrict morality, they will not aſcribe it to its true cauſe, but will raſhly condemn the faith which appears to have ſo little efficacy with

its teachers. Should they find the perſon, who is ſet over them, to be as ignorant as themſelves; or obſerve one of their old companions, from behind the counter, elevated to the ſacred office, the office will be no longer ſacred in their eſtimation: the Teacher is an object of ridicule, and it muſt be fortunate indeed, if the doctrine eſcape. Should the perſons, whoſe faith is thus ſhaken, examine the lives of our opulent and dignified Clergy, will they find matter to reconcile them to their religion? I fear not.—The general practice of Simony, the diſcouragements that virtue and merit conſequently meet with, and the neglect of order and diſcipline, have pretty effectually provided againſt the intruſion of exemplary characters among the well-beneficed ſons of the Church.

Your Lordſhip deſerves much commendation for your benevolent deſign of augmenting the inferior Livings; but I am at a loſs to account for your overlooking ſo entirely the intereſts of that moſt oppreſſed, and moſt laborious body of men, the *unbeneficed* Clergy. This omiſſion of your Lordſhip's

ſhip's obliges me to give a wider ſcope to the ſubject, and to add to your Lordſhip's ſtate of the Livings, ſuch general remarks on the diſtreſſed ſituation of the inferior Clergy, as my obſervation has ſupplied.—Luckily for the argument, there is not a part of the Kingdom but is fertile in examples.

The poverty of the Welch livings is proverbial, but the ſituation of Curates there is beyond meaſure deplorable. I have heard, from reputable authority, that in ſome parts of Wales, a Clergyman frequently officiates at three places on a Sunday, the whole annual income from which does not exceed ſixteen or ſeventeen pounds. After ſervice at one place, he rides poſt eight or ten miles, whatever be the weather, to the next; and defiled with duſt and ſweat, or his cloaths dripping with rain, he proceeds to celebrate the moſt ſolemn ſervices of devotion.

Happy the country Curate, who, by drudging at a ſchool, can preſerve himſelf and his family from want. But this, however *inconſiſtent with*

the care of an extenſive pariſh, is an advantage not always within their reach. In ſome of the Northern counties, it is not uncommon for the Miniſter of the pariſh to drive home his cow, or to exerciſe the reſpectable office of a Bone-ſetter or Tooth-drawer, for a ſcanty hire. It is a fact that can be atteſted, that ſome years ago, in a certain pariſh in that part of the world, a ſubſcription was ſet on foot to equip the Miniſter with a *wig*; and more than once, the children of the ſame gentleman were actually preſerved from nakedneſs, by the bounty of his neighbours. What renders the fact more intereſting, is, that the unfortunate gentleman had an expenſive Academical education, was a man of worth, of genius, and of extenſive erudition. Nor is the caſe better in other parts. A literary gentleman, now in London, but who at the time reſided in a certain part of Yorkſhire, was ſurprized and ſhocked at the petition of a worthy Clergyman, reduced to beg the caſt cloaths of the family for himſelf and children. The poor man had, it ſeems, a wife and thirteen children, and an income of only twenty-

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five pounds per annum from his Curacy to ſupport them.

It is needleſs to multiply inſtances. If we examine nearer home, in Eſſex or any of the ſouthern counties, ſhall we find the Clergy in a much better ſituation? And in the Metropolis there is, at this moment, many a Clergyman on the brink of ſtarving. Not to ſpeak of the numbers who are out of employ, ſcarcely one ſtipendiary Curate in London reaps a livelihood from his profeſſion. It is well known, the hire of Curates is commonly from twenty to forty pounds per annum*; and where there is conſtant duty every day of the week,and twice on a Sunday, fifty or ſixty pounds per annum is accounted an extraordinary allowance. The conſequence is contempt indiſcriminately thrown upon the whole order. If a ſtrange Clergyman ſhews his face in London, to do any occa-

* I could mention churches in the city, where the Curates have but twenty pounds per annum, for performing the whole of the duty every Sunday morning. It is obvious that, ſuppoſing a man with this ſtipend could be ſo fortunate as to obtain a lectureſhip (the value of which in general is from twenty to thirty pounds per annum); and which, if a Methodiſt, there are hopes he may obtain, he would not withal derive a ſubſiſtence from his profeſſion.

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ſional piece of duty for a friend, (I have heard the complaint from ſeveral, and I appeal to experience) is he not treated as a blackguard? As we are imitative animals, I am ſorry to ſay, that the ſuperior Clergy themſelves are not uninfected with the vulgar prejudice; and, to the diſcredit of their religion, too often eſtimate the merits of their brethren by the income of their preferments *. Not ſo were the Clergy reſpected a century ago; and even now, in country places, where a man of character lives in independence as Miniſter of a pariſh, the good effects are evident in the ſuperior degree of attention and regard, which we find reflected on religion itſelf.

* The following anecdote deſerves to outlive the book in which it is recorded: "It was matter of aſtoniſhment and concern to myſelf, as well as to many others, to hear, at an Epiſcopal viſitation, a public invitation given, to all the RECTORS and VICARS, TO DINE WITH HIS L——P; and this in the preſence of the *Curates*, who conſtituted the moſt numerous part of his *clerical* attendants; and were forced to undergo the *undeſerved mortification*, to be ear-witneſſes of this *excluſive* proclamation. Confuſion ſeemed to ſeize them; and the *honeſt* and *indignant* blood ſuffuſed their downcaſt faces—but not through conſciouſneſs of either guilt or blame: and, *like ſheep without a ſhepherd*, in diſorder and dejection, they were obliged to retire from that ſacred place wherein they had been convened, to ſeek for corporeal refreſhment where they could find it."—Some affecting Conſiderations, reſpecting the unbeneficed Clergy, by J. C. Knowles, &c.

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As the indolence of the beneficed Clergy increaſes in exact proportion with the miſery of the inferior, we find that the care of moſt pariſhes is committed to perſons nearly circumſtanced as I have deſcribed: for not one Rector or Vicar in ten reſides upon his cure. Now it is impoſſible that precepts coming from a man, whoſe condition his pariſhioners do not eſteem as much ſuperior to that of a common mendicant, will be tolerably regarded; and if it were poſſible, they would want the reſpectability of example to enforce them. It is impoſſible a mind thus diſtreſſed can think with compoſure, or act with dignity. Unprovided with books, and barely kept alive, what compoſitions can he produce, that will have matter and energy to awake, or to preſerve in his audience, the true ſpirit of devotion? How can he *reprove*, *rebuke*, *exhort* *? There are many good things (ſays an old Poet) which a man can-

* "It is to be queſtioned, whether he who runs upon truſt for every ounce of proviſion he ſpends in his family, can ſcarce look from his pulpit into any ſeat of the Church, but he ſpies ſomebody or other that he is beholden to, and depends upon; and, for want of money, has ſcarce confidence to ſpeak handſomely to his ſexton."—Eachard's Contempt of the Clergy—*a book well worthy re-publication.*

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not ſay in a tattered coat. To how many mean and degrading offices muſt he ſtoop? How many affronts to religion, as well as to his own perſon, muſt he patiently endure? Where are there means of gaining converts by his good actions, of cheriſhing virtue and piety, of ſetting the example in alms-giving and works of beneficence? Yet to this comfortleſs, unhappy condition, the butt of ignorance, the neceſſary tool of power, and, at the beſt, an object of pity, the victim of parental folly is condemned; the bare intereſt of the money expended on his education is not retrieved by the profits of his labour: and this, without the ſmalleſt probability of alleviation. In other genteel profeſſions there is hope, that after the uſual time ſpent in probationſhip, a man may become his own maſter, and depend, in ſome meaſure, on his own induſtry for ſucceſs; here alone induſtry can do nothing, where education points every finer feeling; here no proſpect offers, but that of growing grey in ſervitude, and lingering out the laſt years of life with ſcarcely a ſubſiſtence. While the wages of aſſiſtants in every common

common trade have been raiſed proportionably with the dearneſs of living, the ſalaries of Curates have continued the ſame they were forty years ago. I challenge any man to produce, out of the range of college preferment, a ſingle inſtance of a Clergyman brought forward from an inferior ſtation, purely on the ſcore of merit. Nay, in the preſent overflow of Clergy, it requires ſuit and intereſt to obtain a decent Curacy: If a man happen to be ejected, it is not an eaſy matter to get into any at all; and, unleſs he be otherwiſe independent, he may periſh for want before a vacancy preſents itſelf.

It may be ſaid, if this be a true ſtate of the caſe, why do Gentlemen enter into this profeſſion, under ſo many diſadvantages? I anſwer, fewer Gentlemen of liberal education than ever have of late years embraced the profeſſion; and were it not for the fatal effects of a ruinous war, and the conſequent decline of commerce, they would be ſtill fewer. From whence then is the Church ſupplied even to a redundancy? Like Jereboam's

Prieſthood, *from the loweſt of the people*, who wanting capacity or diligence to exerciſe a manual art, or to ſucceed in a commercial ſtation, fly for refuge to the Church, which by their ignorance they diſhonour, and whoſe exiſtence they endanger, by the flagrancy of their conduct. Two cauſes have principally contributed to the admiſſion of incompetent perſons into holy orders. 1ſt, The ſuperficial qualifications required in Candidates for ordination. 2dly, The abſurd idea, that becauſe a Living happens to be in the gift of a family, it is injuſtice to refuſe ordination to whatever ſon or nephew the Patron chuſes to preſent.

Before we proceed to conſider the firſt of theſe topics, it may not be improper to remark, that from hence originates not only much contempt to religion, but much of the poverty of its Miniſters. The Northern counties abound in free-ſchools, where the children of the peaſantry are inſtructed *gratis* in the dead languages. It is a proſpect flattering to a poor country fellow, to have his ſon provided for in an order, which

which *ſeems* to place him in the rank of a Gentleman; one ſon is of courſe deſtined for the Miniſtry; the youth is nurtured from infancy in all the ruſtic vanity of this idea; he has, or obtains a right, to be admitted into the ſeminary; the attendance required there, does not interrupt his manual labours in the *ſeaſon* when they are moſt wanted; he attends alternately the ſchool and the plough; and after a novitiate performed with the barefoot mortification of an ancient pilgrimage, by the addition of a new coat, the peruſal of *Grotius de veritate*, and the four Goſpels in Greek, a ſham title, and teſtimonial from perſons who never heard of him before, our candidate ſtarts up notably accompliſhed for the office of an inſtructor of mankind: though for any eſſential qualification, your Lordſhip might as well ordain any boy out of our common charity ſchools. There is another proceſs which takes place in ſome parts where there are not endowed ſchools. You ſhall ſee a perſon who has performed the moſt ſervile offices in the kitchen of a country School-maſter, after a little time promoted to the

rank of a petty Uſher; on the firſt vacancy he is admitted into holy orders, with no other knowledge than that of a vocabulary and Lilly's grammar, deſtitute of claſſical taſte or ſcientific attainments, a monſter of ignorance, conceit, and prejudice. Such men, unincumbered with the dignity of birth, genius, or learning, are admirably qualified for all the vulgar arts of ſucceeding in the world: they can flatter without a bluſh, they can hunt with the 'ſquire, get drunk with the 'ſquire, ſwear with the 'ſquire; in their converſation he will find nothing to reproach his own ignorance; they will ſubmit to the moſt humiliating treatment; they will be patient laughing-ſtocks, on which a coarſe jeſt may be ſafely broken, without the danger of re-action. Such men may afford to *underſell* their *Academic* brethren; more than once I have known them offer to ſerve Cures at an inferior price; and when livings are bought and ſold, it is evident the purchaſer will employ the cheapeſt, as he will naturally be inclined to make the moſt of his bargain. The conſequence is, indolence in the firſt place;

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every petty Vicar, or Chaplain, being above performing his proper duties, while he can have a Curate, who will ſerve him almoſt for the ſake of getting into orders: and whenever a better vacancy happens, theſe perſons are ready to joſtle out of it, a man of a really liberal education.

Many words will not be requiſite to prove the injuſtice and ill policy of the ſecond corruption adverted to. It is well known, that having acquired a living by *purchaſe*, (the very circumſtance, by the way, that ought to be eſteemed the moſt effectual bar) is accounted a ſufficient motive to juſtify the ordination of men, whoſe talents and conduct muſt inevitably bring diſgrace and ridicule on any religious eſtabliſhment. The caſe of the Inn-keeper in Cheſhire, who is reported to have driven a chaiſe in the early part of his life, ordained to a valuable living in G——, is become too notorious to require a circumſtantial detail *. To this inſtance, I will beg leave to add another,

* See Obſervations on the rapid Decline of the Clerical Credit and Character, lately publiſhed.

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out of many. A perſon, who had acquired a conſiderable fortune in one of the branches of the law, among other ſpoils, found himſelf poſſeſſed of a very profitable Advowſon: this perſon had a near relation, a retailer of wine and ſpirituous liquors, whom, when the living fell vacant, he preſented: at upwards of forty years of age, without a ſingle qualification, claſſical or moral, the man was ordained and inſtituted.—A *Gentleman in a very high ſtation in the Church*, can vouch for the truth of this anecdote, if the teſtimony of ſome hundreds of the Laity, who were ſcandalized at the tranſaction, ſhould be deemed inadequate. The *mock examination* of a certain Clergyman, poſſeſſed of very lucrative preferment in N——, ſtands upon record. I am obliged to be perſonal, leſt it ſhould be objected that no examples could be produced. In tenderneſs to the Church, and to ſome characters, who are the innocent inſtruments of its diſgrace, I ſpare entering upon a conſiderable catalogue of ſimilar abuſes: reſerving them for another opportunity, ſhould

ſhould I be provoked to produce them *. Now, my Lord, let me ſeriouſly aſk you, where will this increaſing evil ſtop? IF ANY DECAYED TRADESMAN OR MECHANIC SHALL, BY BECOMING POSSESSED OF A LIVING, (IN PLAIN TERMS BY *Simony*) OBTAIN A RIGHT TO PREACH, THE NECESSITY OF LEARNING WILL BE ALTOGETHER SUPERSEDED; or perhaps, by way of compenſation for the relinquiſhment of all worldly comforts, the ſole right and title to knowledge is meant to be transferred to the inferior order—and who, my Lord, with ſuch limited proſpects, will be at the pains to acquire erudition?

A ſyſtem like this, my Lord, ſo unjuſt, ſo venal, ſo oppreſſive, cannot long ſubſiſt. The indignant ſpirit of a generous nation will riſe againſt it. To obſerve the worthleſs Pluraliſt, taking no thought for the multitudes committed to his care,

* My acquaintance with the Right Reverend Bench is very ſlight, nor is it ever likely to be extenſive; yet, within the circle of my knowledge, ſince the *diſbanding the Militia*, many applications have been made, and backed with powerful intereſt, in favour of Candidates for orders, from that moſt *liberal of Academies*, willing to contribute to the *edification* of the Church.

but

but indulging in indolence, purſuing preferment amidſt all the corruptions of a Court, or immerſed in diſſipation; while his humble aſſiſtants have ſcarcely a ſupport, or are neceſſitated to engage in other employments, to the great neglect of their clerical office—Such a ſyſtem as this, my Lord, preſents not the idea of a religious eſtabliſhment, but of a trading community. I ought, in purſuance of the plan I have laid down, to bring inſtances of the fatal effects from the relaxation of the ancient diſcipline of the Church. But, indeed, my Lord, it is with reluctance I even mention the ſubject; and I muſt beg leave to diſpatch it in generals, without deſcending to a painful detail. I have ſeen, and I have heard of the *moſt abandoned profligacy*; *drunkenneſs and gaming*; *adultery*, I fear I might add *inceſt*; *duelling*, or intentional murder; cheriſhed in the boſom of the church, unchaſtiſed and uncenſured. You, my Lord, will, I doubt not, fulfil the duty of a Chriſtian Prelate; and I truſt emulation, or a ſenſe of right, will influence your

brethren

brethren to imitate your conduct. If a few examples of timely ſeverity were exhibited; if but a few of the moſt notorious offenders were degraded from the ſacred office, and their preferments put into more deſerving hands, a change of conduct in the Clergy throughout the kingdom would be the certain conſequence.

Having dwelt, as I fear your Lordſhip will be inclined to think, ſufficiently long on the moſt diſagreeable part of my undertaking; I now proceed to point out a few particular advantages, that might reſult from ſuch a reformation as I am about to recommend. 1ſt, It is not eaſy to ſay, what that licentiouſneſs, which is yet ſcarcely arrived at maturity, may, in a little time, be enabled to effect. If the levelling principles of thoſe who call themſelves Free-thinkers ſhould prevail but a little more, God knows whether, in a few years, we ſhall have a BISHOP left in the Kingdom. Now what ſo natural, ſo effectual a defence can be erected round the Epiſcopal dignity, as a learned, principled, and well-regulated Clergy?

'Tis true this argument may be accounted viſionary by ſome, but there are others leſs liable to this imputation.—For, 2dly, You, my Lord, and your Right Reverend brethren, will experience reſpect from the people, exactly in proportion with the reſt of the Clergy. It were a poor ambition to be a King of Beggars, or a Preſident of a club of Shoe-blacks; but *Cæſar, with a ſenate at his heels*, however ſatyriſts may declaim, is an object that cannot fail to intereſt the human paſſions. 3dly, We have heard much of the ſelfiſhneſs and rapacity of wealthy Churchmen—Perhaps the charge is not entirely without a foundation in nature: eſpecially, where a man has riſen late in life by *chance, or by a courſe of ſervices in the family of his Patron*, from a ſtate of poverty and oppreſſion, in which he has loſt the generous feelings of his early years. 4thly, As the example of the Clergy is of the utmoſt importance, the virtue of a conſiderable number would be moſt effectually guarded, by providing better for them. Independence, and a comfortable fire-ſide, are potent amulets againſt vice and temptation.

temptation *. In the preſent circumſtances, no unbeneficed Clergyman can enjoy the happineſs of domeſtic life, without the danger of involving in extreme difficulties himſelf, and what is probably much dearer to him. 5thly, I appeal to ſome noble Commanders by ſea and land, whether the children of Clergymen do not rank among the ableſt, the moſt courageous, and the beſt educated of thoſe Champions, to whom we are indebted for our political exiſtence. 6thly, By augmenting the ſtipends of aſſiſtant Curates, the diligence of the beneficed Clergy would be much promoted, and a more conſtant reſidence on their livings would be the ſalutary conſequence. 7thly, Were the inferior Clergy made more independent in their circum-

* "I ſay I cannot prove it ſtrictly and undeniably, that a man ſmally beneficed, muſt of neceſſity be diſſolute and debauched: but when we conſider how much he lies ſubject to the humour of all kind of reprobates; and how eaſily he is tempted from his own houſe of poverty and melancholy; it is to be feared, that he will be willing too often to forſake his own ſtudy of a few ſcurvy books, and his own habitation of darkneſs, where there is ſeldom good eating or drinking, for a good lightſome one, where there is a bountiful proviſion of both; and when he comes here, though he ſwears not at all, yet he muſt be ſure to ſay nothing to them that do it; and though he judges not fit to lead the forlorn in vice and profaneneſs; yet if he goes about to damp a frolic, there is great danger not only of loſing his Sunday's dinner, but all opportunities of ſuch future refreſhments."—Eachard's Contempt, &c.

ſtances, rational liberty would acquire a number of able and ſtrenuous ſupporters. 8thly, The preſent injudicious diſtribution of the property of the Church, is a leading objection with ſome of the moſt candid and reſpectable Diſſenters from our Eſtabliſhment: many of whom profeſs no other motive for their ſeparation. Will not, therefore, the meaſure, I recommend, tend to leſſen conſiderably the number of Sectaries among us? An object of importance, I am ſure, in the eyes of all, who wiſh well to the *cauſe* of *Chriſtianity* and *Proteſtantiſm*.

If to remedy the evils and diſtreſſes, which have been the ſubject of the preceding pages, were an intricate ſpeculation, or a taſk difficult or hazardous, I ſhould be ſorry to ſee your Lordſhip the dupe of your benevolence, by involving yourſelf in a perplexed or dangerous conteſt; but, my Lord, I never could eſteem it an arduous undertaking. If the intereſts of the unbeneficed Clergy have been hitherto neglected, it is becauſe no man of power and abilities in our time

time has thought them worth attending to. There are ſome eaſy remedies which, ſpiritedly applied, I cannot help thinking, would reſtore vigour to a debilitated ſyſtem, and effect a revolution highly grateful to humanity, and eſſentially ſerviceable to religion.

Had your Lordſhip taken up the buſineſs on the extenſive ſcale which its importance deſerves, I would never, to gratify my perſonal vanity, have troubled the world with a republication of this letter. As it is, I muſt beg leave to intrude a little further on your patience, by ſubmitting to your conſideration, 1ſt, Additional hints for improving the ſituation of the beneficed Clergy; and, 2dly, Means of providing better for the unbeneficed Clergy, and of preventing the admiſſion of unqualified perſons, to the exerciſe of the ſacred function, &c.

Additional Hints for improving the Situation of the beneficed Clergy.

I. The odious and unchriſtian practice of Simony ought to be as much as poſſible reſtrained: for this purpoſe *the Laws now in being ſhould be ſtrictly executed, and a new Law made to prevent any preſentation, except by the Dioceſan, for twenty years after the ſale or transfer of an Advowſon. Proſecutions for Simony ought to be allowed at any length of time after the fact, the Living made void upon conviction, and the Clergyman, who bought it, degraded for life from the Holy office.*

Pariſhioners would then (if proſecutions might be commenced, whatever time had elapſed) know their own ſtrength; they would have it in their power to diſplace an obnoxious Paſtor, if he had illegally obtruded himſelf among them.

By means of this deteſtable crime, men of ſcandalous and debauched characters often gain admiſſion

admiſſion into the Church; while the induſtrious Student, who has expended his fortune and his health in the purſuit of wiſdom, is effectually debarred that reward and diſtinction, which would otherwiſe invigorate his endeavours, by inflaming his emulation. Beſides this, it is a temptation to another ſhocking vice; Simony cannot be perpetrated without the addition of *Perjury*. Now, there is a delicacy of virtue, which when once violated, can ſeldom be regained; a Clergyman who has perjured himſelf, cannot be ſuppoſed to be very nice about leſſer crimes: either the oath, therefore, or the practice of Simony, ought to be aboliſhed *.

II. *Small livings, when contiguous, and it may conveniently be done, ſhould be conſolidated.* The

* "Divers Acts of Parliament (ſays Juſtice Blackſtone) have been made to reſtrain it (Simony) by civil forfeitures; *which the modern prevailing uſage, with regard to ſpiritual preferments, calls aloud to be put in execution.*"

Comment. vol. ii. c. 18, p. 279.

A ſlight alteration might be made with advantage in the oath; inſtead of "I N. N. do ſwear that *I have made* no Simoniacal contract, &c." "I N. N. do ſwear that no Simoniacal contract *has been made* to my knowledge, &c. and I verily believe that no contract or promiſe whatever has been made by any perſon or perſons, &c."

welfare

welfare of the Church depends not on the numbers, but on the reſpectability and characters of the Churchmen *.

As for any difficulties attending this regulation, they are eaſily obviated. The Biſhops, on their viſitations, might ſoon inform themſelves what Livings could be conveniently united, and make a return to Parliament within a limited time, that when the ſmaller Livings become vacant they ſhould ceaſe to be filled up. The injuſtice of depriving Patrons of the right of preſentation, might be avoided by granting the Patron of the ſmaller Living a privilege of occaſionally preſenting, and proportioning this privilege to the value of the Living.

III. *An annual tax of ſo much in the pound might be laid on all Livings of above* 400*l. per annum, to*

* The Romiſh Clergy are numerous, though but poorly provided for; and it is worth obſerving, that it requires all the pomp of ſuperſtition to keep up a decent reverence for religion on the Continent. A *Prieſt*, or a *Frier*, is generally the *butt* of the company; and, it muſt be confeſſed, *ſeldom an improper ſubject*.

be

be applied to the augmentation of ſuch ſmall Livings and Chapelries as are objects of Queen Anne's bounty.

IV. To your Lordſhip's propoſal for detracting from the revenues of Deans and Chapters, I will add another hint, without inſiſting much upon it, it making no material part of my ſcheme.

The abuſes of endowed ſchools are very enormous; and except Eton, Weſtminſter, and a few others, they are, for the moſt part, become mere ſinecures—At ſome ſchools in the country, to my knowledge, where the revenue is from 200l. to 400l. per annum, there are not above four or five ſcholars; if the children of Gentlemen, they pay as much as at any private ſeminary. Now, private ſchools are found to anſwer much better for thoſe who wiſh a learned education; and I am clearly of opinion, that free-ſchools, for any other purpoſe than teaching Engliſh, writing, and accounts, that is, fitting men for common occupations, are even pernicious in a State. It merits, therefore, the attention of the legiſlature, *whether*

the real intereſts of religion and literature, would not be better promoted by the appropriation of ſchool lands to the increaſing of the poorer Benefices?

V. *The Livings being thus made a competent maintenance, no man ſhould be allowed to poſſeſs more than* ONE; *and reſidence ought to be inſiſted on under forfeiture of the Living.* It is a general complaint, that ſeldom any part of the ſpiritual emoluments is ſpent among thoſe from whom they are derived; and that pariſhes, inſtead of finding in the Rector a uſeful and intelligent adviſer, moderator, and protector, who might be of the greateſt uſe in his neighbourhood, by example as well as precept, are commonly left under the care of a boy, or ſome very inferior perſon.

MEANS OF PROVIDING MORE LIBERALLY FOR THE UNBENEFICED CLERGY, AND OF PREVENTING THE ADMISSION OF UNQUALIFIED PERSONS TO THE EXERCISE OF THE SACRED FUNCTION, &c.

I. *No ſtipendiary Curate can ſubſiſt with decency on leſs than* 50*l. per annum in the country, nor on leſs than* 80*l. in London. It ought, further, to be enacted, that where the Living is above* 200*l. per annum, the aſſiſtant Curate may demand in proportion to its preſent value, or any pariſhioner may inſiſt on the Curate being proportionably paid, on making proof of the value of the Benefice in the Conſiſtory Court. Thus, if the value of the benefice be* 250*l. per annum, the Curate's ſalary might be* 55*l. per annum*; *if* 300*l.* 60*l.*; *if* 350*l.* 65*l.*; *if* 400*l.* 70*l.*; *if* 500*l.* 80*l.*; *if* 600*l.* 90*l.*; *if* 800*l. or upwards,* 100*l.* If a Rector of a ſmall living be in health, he has no occaſion for a Curate, and by this means all great pariſhes would have an opportunity of offering a decent ſupport to men of ability, and, if they choſe, might never be without

perſons of character and learning in the ſtation of Paſtor among them.

It is a poor evaſion, to ſay that the Biſhops have this power already veſted in them (though by the way, I believe it extends no further than the power of augmenting them to 50l.). I am ſure no Biſhop would be diſpleaſed to be releaſed from the invidious taſk. If any Biſhop were to undertake ſuch a regulation, he muſt content himſelf to be in a ſtate of war with all the wealthy Clergymen of his Dioceſe; and they might complain, with ſome colour of juſtice, that he officiouſly interfered; ſince they had a right to make as advantageous an agreement as they could: and the Curates muſt be, *for obvious reaſons*, apparently content. Whereas, if the ſtipend were abſolutely fixed by Law, there would be no room for evaſion; the Curate and the Pariſhioners would then know their rights, and might with confidence demand them.

II. To prevent the admiſſion of unqualified perſons into the Church, *I think Ordination ought to be*

be made a more ſerious buſineſs than it uſually is. No leſs than three Biſhops and their Chaplains ought to attend every Ordination; and on this account, it will be obvious, that no Ordination could be conveniently held out of London, and that they muſt, in that caſe, be held at ſtated periods of the year. An objection will perhaps be made, that by this means many Cures may remain unſupplied for ſome time, and much inconvenience accrue to the Pariſhioners; I anſwer, this is at moſt a temporary evil, and aſſiſtance may always be procured, if they will but pay handſomely. Nay, I would rather ſee a Church once in ſeven years without divine ſervice for a month or two, than that improper perſons ſhould, on this plea, be permitted to exerciſe the ſacred function.

It would perhaps be too ſevere to exclude all, who have not been educated at an Univerſity. By ſuch a regulation, ſome perſons of firſt-rate abilities might be rejected. Yet, with all the injuſtice of ſuch a regulation, a temporary obſervance of it might perhaps be ſalutary. While the

Church, from the influx of Refugees from America*, and other cauſes, continues ſo notoriouſly overſtocked, I think the Biſhops ought, at leaſt, to enter into an agreement among themſelves to ordain none, who have not been regularly brought up to the profeſſion.

I believe it will not be diſputed, that the qualifications commonly inſiſted on in Candidates for Ordination are not ſufficient. To be able to make out the meaning of a verſe in the Greek Teſtament, or to write a ſentence of Latin barely grammatical, certainly do not include every requiſite quality for a teacher of the moſt ſublime ſciences, religion, and morals. When I mentioned an Univerſity education, it was not my intention to inſinuate, that merely to have viſited an Univerſity, ſhould entitle a man to Holy orders. An accurate acquaintance with our own language, and a knowledge of the moſt uſeful

* I have heard it aſſerted, but upon what grounds I cannot affirm, that the number of Clerical Refugees was not leſs than one thouſand five hundred.

ſciences,

ſciences, ſhould be added to the requiſite attainments in Greek and Latin; and the proofs of his ability, given on his examination, ſhould alone enable him to enter on the ſacred office. The better to aſcertain this, I would recommend, *that a Formulary be drawn up by ſome of the moſt learned perſons in the Church, and ſet forth by authority, conſiſting of ſuch queſtions and exerciſes in every ſcience ſubſervient to Theology, as may neceſſarily prove an acquaintance with thoſe ſciences.* To this exerciſe, the examiners may add ſuch queſtions as they may judge proper to aſſure them of the abilities of the Candidate. *An Engliſh theme is never inſiſted upon, and yet it ought never to be omitted.* They are to preach in Engliſh, and not in Latin; and certainly if not capable of compoſing a page of plain ſenſe in their mother-tongue, they can ſcarcely be deemed proper inſtructors of mankind.

III. *The practice of ſelling titles, or nominating to Curacies, without a real intention of employing the perſon nominated, might be reſtrained, by impoſing a fine of* 500*l. half to the proſecutor, on any Clergy-*

man,

man, convicted of not paying his Curate, according to the ſtipend ſet forth in his nomination; and the Curate himſelf ought to be examined on oath, information being lodged of the fact.

IV. When the circumſtances of the Clergy are better provided for, *let their morals be ſtrictly obſerved.* The laws in being are fully adequate to the prevention of ſcandal to religion by the conduct of its teachers, and only want to be enforced.

If I judge rightly of your Lordſhip, your liberal ſpirit will not be offended by the freedom of this addreſs. I am prepared for a few hard names, which ſome will doubtleſs beſtow upon me, as ſuits their intereſt or their prejudice. In this I ſhall have ſome conſolation, in being a fellow-ſufferer with your Lordſhip. I ſhall be called a *Viſionary* by ſome, a *Diſturber of the public tranquillity* by others, an *Enemy to the Church*, who, under the colour of a friend, has artfully taken occaſion to expoſe its defects. My Lord, I do

not

not queſtion that I ſhall appear in the eye of the judicious and the candid, a real friend to the Church. The enemies of the Church, my Lord, are thoſe who know theſe things, and have it in their power to reform them, and yet neglect to do it—It is not the man who pleads earneſtly for reformation: nay, it is not the pen of a Hume or a Gibbon that injures the Church; it is thoſe who plead for ſuch abuſes as I have expoſed, abuſes ſhameful in their appearance, and fatal in their nature.

It may be ſaid, that the Church has exiſted a conſiderable time in its preſent ſtate—My Lord, I deny the poſition—I deny that Simony was ever ſo generally, ſo unbluſhingly practiſed, as within theſe laſt twenty years—I deny that there ever was ſuch a conflux of unlettered perſons into the Church—I deny that Curates were ever ſo cheap as now, if we but conſider the preſent value of money: nor can this fail to be the caſe, when a Rector may obtain ordination for his footman, who will be happy to ſerve his Cure for a ſmall

advance in wages—I deny that there ever was a time, from the Reformation, when Clergymen were aſhamed of their duty, or indulged in the indolence and diſſipation that every petty Vicar does at preſent, while he can hire an aſſiſtant at a Porter's ſtipend. It is not the ancient conſtitution of the Church, my Lord, to expoſe to want and contempt the moſt worthy and induſtrious of its Miniſters, or to force them to ignoble or immoral methods of eſcaping poverty, or to the neceſſity of neglecting their charge, by the exerciſe of profeſſions incompatible with the care of a pariſh. Our Reformers eſtabliſhed Degrees and Dignities in the Church, and wiſely; but they never eſtabliſhed want and meanneſs, idleneſs, and luxury. It is the ancient conſtitution of the Church, that "thoſe who ſerve at the Altar, ſhould live by the Altar." This is aſſerted by the Canons, and ſanctioned by *Parliament*, which has repeatedly interpoſed, as the value of money altered, to regulate the ſtipends of the inferior Clergy.

Should

Should your Lordſhip, occupied with ſuperior cares, not deign to direct your attention to the well-grounded complaints of the loweſt branch of your Order, it is impoſſible but ſome man muſt be found, whoſe reſpect for Chriſtianity, whoſe love of letters, or whoſe humanity, will intereſt him in their behalf. To the man, who ſhall undertake the ſo much-wiſhed for reform, I will venture to predict much oppoſition and enmity from the dull, the mercenary, and the hypocritical; but I will preſume to promiſe, in return, the unanimous ſupport and unwavering attachment of a diſtreſſed yet reſpectable body, in which are included many perſons of the firſt abilities, and of genuine worth and integrity; he will have the countenance of every good man among the Laity; he will have the applauſe of every one, who has the intereſts of religion at heart; he will have more than this, the conſciouſneſs of a great and virtuous action; he will have (with reverence I utter it) the bleſſing of approving Heaven!

Should, after all, not a man be found brave enough, in a profligate age, to ſtep forth in ſuch a cauſe, there is one chance yet left for the diſtreſſed objects of this publication, the *unbeneficed Clergy*, BY PETITIONING THE COLLECTIVE BODY OF THE LEGISLATURE, *who, to do them juſtice, have ſeldom been inattentive to the obvious dictates of truth and humanity.*

But if no arguments can prevail with others to do them juſtice, nor with themſelves to aſſert their rights, I have at leaſt done my duty; and I am not without hopes, that this faithful repreſentation of facts, if it does no public, may do ſome private good. If, reader, you are a parent, and are bleſſed with a child of hopeful carriage, and of improving parts—let me intreat you to beſtow a little attention on the ſubject of theſe pages. If you wiſh to devote him to a life of obſcurity and labour—Conſider, is there no humble ſtation in life, to which you may with leſs cruelty conſign him?—Genius is ever the mark of envy, but it is then peculiarly ſo, when unprotected, and at the mercy of the world—Place then your child in an

inferior ſtation, if you think penury or mortification eſſential to virtue—But ſpare him the additional miſery of a refined education. His wiſhes may otherwiſe be proportioned to his means: but ſpare him the heart-galling ſting of diſappointed merit *.

I take my leave of your Lordſhip, wiſhing that ſucceſs to your endeavours in the ſervice of reli-

* The following picture may not be improper to be hung up *in terrorem*; if it wants ſome of the graces of the pencil, the Artiſt drew with feeling, and from actual experience; it is extracted from different parts of the above-quoted book, "Affecting Conſiderations, &c."—"Let a man's intellectual endowments be however great—Let his education be the beſt the nation affords—Let his conduct and morals be uniformly regular and irreproachable—Yet, after all, if he is obliged to hire himſelf, upon the preſent conditions, to ſome mercenary Prieſt for bread; his abilities will receive, from his *ſmall ſtipend*, conſiderable diſadvantage, and his example loſe much of its worth and luſtre; his public diſcourſes will be heard with indifference, for the Congregation ought to come prepared no leſs than the Preacher; his private judgment will be thought far inferior to that of his more fortunate neighbour; and his reproofs will be eſteemed, like his purſe, light and inſignificant: but in theſe he muſt be very ſparing, and poſſibly may not venture to uſe them at all; leſt the few favours which a compaſſion for his neceſſities may excite, ſhould be totally withdrawn. His diligence, with reſpect to this world, is of no avail: but whether he leads a ſingle or a married life—has a ſmall or a numerous family—enjoys an unintermitted health, or has many interruptions in it; his ſcanty allowance muſt carry him through every viciſſitude to which he is liable; and if, through a number of years, or any accident or conſtitutional infirmity, he becomes incapable of longer ſervice in his Maſter's vineyard, he is turned upon the world *deſtitute* and *helpleſs*."

gion,

gion, which your zeal and your abilities are well calculated to accompliſh, unleſs envy, avarice, and bigottry ſhould unite to cruſh them. I intreat your Lordſhip not to be diſcouraged by the murmurs of ſhallow and unprincipled opponents—The approbation of one man of ſenſe is worth a million of their ſuffrages. Proceed, my Lord, with your natural ſpirit and perſeverance to the root of the evil; nor think the independence of a Curate leſs eſſential to the welfare of Chriſtianity, than that of a Biſhop. If you cannot do *all* the good you wiſh, you may at leaſt do *ſome*. The propoſals I have ſtarted, as I think them the moſt efficacious, ſo I am convinced they are the leaſt exceptionable reforms that can be made. I know there are many in both Houſes that will ſupport them; but a reformation will originate more ſafely, and with a better grace from the venerable Bench, on which you are ſo deſervedly ſeated. Should the Author of this Letter be ever known to your Lordſhip, (though by the way not a very probable event I believe it will be found, that *intereſted motives could have no ſhare in its production.*

duction. I may be an Enthuſiaſt, but if ſo, I truſt I am an Enthuſiaſt upon conviction. I can ſolemnly aver, that I ſat down to the enquiry, without a ſingle prejudice; and I am perſuaded, that if any man will beſtow upon it equal diligence, with half my impartiality, he will diſcern *principles of corruption in the preſent Conſtitution of the Church, which muſt of themſelves produce alterations for the worſe*, if alterations for the better be not ſpeedily adopted: ſhould the perverſeneſs of mankind perſiſt in calling that alteration, which is no more than reducing, in ſome degree, an inſtitution to its original purity.

A CHURCH OF ENGLAND-MAN.

FINIS.

7 JUN